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DEMOCRACY AND DIPLOMACY

BY PHILIP MARSHALL BROWN

EXPLANATIONS of the causes of the Great War are naturally diverse, varying with the prejudices, the temperament, and the type of mind of each individual. Some assert with much assurance that it was caused by militarism—a conveniently vague term like socialism. Others claim that it was caused by commercial greed, by ambitions for world-power, by the mutual distrust of nations, or the passions and evil hearts of men.

An explanation readily accepted is that the great catastrophe is directly due to the intrigues and the machinations of diplomacy. It is easy to picture democracy as the helpless victim of evil diplomats who take a fiendish delight in wicked conspiracies, and find their supreme joy in provoking a horrible world-war. The popular cry now is for the abolition of "secret diplomacy," and the "democratization of foreign policies," in the naïve belief that the people are quite capable of conducting diplomatic negotiations in the market-place. Among the able exponents of this theory are Norman Angell, G. Lowes Dickinson—both Englishmen—and Walter Lippmann, in his interesting book, *The Stakes of Diplomacy*. They support their thesis with considerable dialectic skill, and brush away difficulties with an argument to the effect that things could not be much worse under a democratic control of foreign affairs—a kind of reasoning which would justify invoking the services of a veterinary surgeon in a case of appendicitis or cancer when the skilled physician had failed to give entire satisfaction.

At the outset it would seem desirable to note what seems to be a fundamental misapprehension back of this current distrust of diplomacy, namely, a confusion of methods with policy. Diplomacy and its agents have been credited with possessing power they do not possess, particularly

since the introduction of easy means of communication which no longer, as formerly, permit very much personal freedom of action, initiative, and discretion. They are credited with being the directing force, when they are only the instruments, the agents.

It is true that diplomats intrigue at times, and resort to questionable methods to accomplish their ends; but so do lawyers, business men, politicians, and even representatives of philanthropic or religious organizations. One does not feel justified thereby in condemning the profession of law, business, politics, philanthropy, or religion. In many instances, if the firm, society, or organization find that their representatives are behaving improperly, they are quick to reprove, punish, or discharge such unworthy agents. In other instances, if the directing policy of these organizations is found to be dishonest or vicious, criticism is properly centered, not on the representatives, but on the management.

And so it is with diplomacy: the agents, the mere tools, are of slight account; the powers that direct, the policies they formulate, are the supreme factors. National policies in international affairs depend very largely on the character and intelligence of the statesmen responsible for the conduct of foreign relations. A Metternich holding reactionary though honest opinions will resort to methods hateful to democracy. A Cavour, fired by nationalistic dreams for his country, will use various means at hand to achieve his worthy ends. So with Gladstone, full of a moral zeal; a Bismarck seeking the unity of Germany, a Hay trying to apply the Golden Rule in international affairs; and a Sir Edward Grey endeavoring to restrain Europe from the brink of disaster. In all these cases, diplomatic methods are bound to respond to the demands and the policies of the statesmen at the head of the nation. Criticism, therefore, should be centered, not on diplomacy in general, but on the policies which diplomacy is instrumental in carrying into effect.

The problem thus becomes a much larger one than the nature of diplomacy: it concerns the formulation of national policies, and the ability of the crowd in the marketplace to formulate these policies. To grapple intelligently with this great problem, it is necessary first of all to be perfectly clear concerning the functions of diplomacy, in

order to avoid certain common misapprehensions which render discussion of the whole subject difficult, or impossible.

Diplomacy has been well defined as "the art of negotiation." It is essentially the application to questions of an international nature of the ordinary rules of negotiation among men, whether in law, business, politics, or any enterprise requiring relations with other men. It requires the same knowledge of men, the same keenness of insight, the same power of discussion, of persuasion; in sum, the same tact, or what we are accustomed to denote generally as common-sense. It is true that there are special forms of etiquette, of technique in writing, and rules of the diplomatic game, which it is desirable to know; but they are not so obscure or complicated as many would infer. They are forms and rules which clever men master easily, and which are readily communicated by clerks and subordinate officials. Diplomacy is far from being what some would seem to suggest—a kind of "Sacred College" of Roman *Fetiales*, who have been initiated into the mysteries of diplomatic negotiation.

The truth of this fact has been borne out in our own history since the days of Benjamin Franklin, our *first* diplomat in every sense of the term. Franklin, Gallatin, Bancroft, Motley, Lowell, Adams, White, Choate, Reid, Herrick, the Pages, van Dyke, Gerard, and Morgenthau, are all instances of the ability of men chosen from public and private life to master the "art of negotiation." The qualities which made them successful as men of affairs at home were the very qualities essential for the duties of American diplomats. To these qualities of mind, heart and personality, must be added the distinction of being, on the whole, truly representative Americans.

Granted then that democracy can usually find able servants to protect its interests abroad, does it follow that democracy is also able to direct their actions, and conduct its own foreign relations? Is democracy competent to determine in the market-place—as Angell and others would insist—the great policies which its representatives are to execute? Must the President and his advisers hold Cabinet meetings in public, and take no action without first obtaining the approval of the populace?

De Tocqueville in his great work on *American Democracy* remarks:

As for myself, I do not hesitate to say that it is especially in the conduct of their foreign relations that democracies appear to me decidedly inferior to other governments. . . . democracy is favorable to the increase of the internal resources of a State; it diffuses wealth and comfort, promotes public spirit, and fortifies respect for law in all classes of society: all these are advantages which have only an indirect influence over the relations which one people bears to another. But a democracy can only with great difficulty regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy, or wait their consequences with patience.

One may well differ from de Tocqueville in his preference for government by aristocracy, but still find much force in his strictures regarding the incapacity of democracy to carry on foreign relations. Our faith in the representative form of government in the United States may be fully justified; and yet we may well agree with de Tocqueville that there are great difficulties in the way of the "democratization of foreign policies."

A most important reason why democracy is not fitted to conduct foreign relations is to be found in the need, alluded to by de Tocqueville, of secrecy—of at least a certain degree of secrecy—in diplomatic negotiations of a delicate nature, as for example, the recent negotiations for the purchase of the Danish West Indies by the United States. Those who urge publicity in foreign affairs can hardly hold that publicity in all human affairs is possible or even desirable. It would not be maintained, for instance, that an industrial corporation could be successfully managed through public meetings of its board of directors and the disclosure to competitors of valuable information. The affairs of a university could not be carried on, with due regard for the interests of all concerned, by public meetings of the trustees or the faculty, in the presence of the students and alumni. It is evident that there is hardly a human interest, whether of the family, private business, or public organization, where a certain degree of secrecy is not prudently required, and eminently proper. There is nothing necessarily reprehensible in a wise reserve, a respect for privacy, a regard for sensibilities, a sincere concern for the adequate protection of legitimate interests.

How much truer this is in matters of international concern, where vast interests must be properly safeguarded, and

questions of extreme delicacy, likely to embroil nations, must be handled with consummate skill. If the President should have private and authentic information that a certain Power was intriguing against the United States and ready at any moment to take aggressive action, how much would it help, in dealing with such a situation, to make an official announcement of the fact? If the Administration were reliably informed that another Power was planning to get possession of the Danish West Indies for the purpose of establishing a naval base to menace American control of the Panama Canal, would it be prudent to so inform the American public and the world in general? In either case, dangerous friction would be created, the diplomatic and military measures adopted by the Government to avert trouble would be largely nullified, and war very likely precipitated, by any such extraordinary disclosures.

There is no doubt, of course, that a certain measure of publicity in affairs of state has been most effective at times in checking abuses and preventing corruption. It is clear also that the growth of constitutional government throughout the world, by its checks on monarchy and aristocracy, has been of great value in thwarting the evil designs and eliminating the dynastic wars of irresponsible monarchs. Publicity, the "thinking out loud" of democracies, of which Lorimer speaks, has unquestionably served an excellent purpose. It is not necessary, however, to go to the extreme of saying that all affairs of state should be conducted with absolute publicity: that they are not subject to the ordinary rules of prudence, reserve and secrecy, observed in other human affairs. This would be quite unreasonable; and yet it is the kind of reasoning that vitiates the proposal for the "democratization of foreign policies," the demand for public negotiations in the market-place.

It should also be borne in mind that, by reason of their elevated position, their widened horizon, their comprehensive knowledge of international politics, their confidential avenues of information, the responsible statesmen of a nation are infinitely better fitted to deal intelligently with a trying diplomatic situation, a great crisis, than the people at large. In times of extreme tension created by such incidents as the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the *Sussex*, the general public of course is at once apprised of the main facts. The President, moreover, yielding to the importunate

demands of the press, is compelled to disclose just as much of the diplomatic negotiations as the exigencies of the situation and the best interests of the country may permit. He cannot, however, take the public completely into his confidence. Even if he gives out the text of important cipher messages before they are received by the other Government, he cannot with prudence or decency disclose the candid though perhaps unauthorized personal statements of the diplomatic representative of that Government, in his loyal efforts to adjust the difficulty on an honorable basis. Partial information is thus worse than no information. The general public may reach entirely erroneous conclusions from the published correspondence, issued in part for "public consumption," when the most important features of the negotiations may have been treated in personal "conversations," which of necessity cannot be made a matter of record, or publicly disclosed. Under such circumstances, democracy must either be discreetly patient, or endanger the efforts of wise and patriotic statesmen to steer the ship of state in time of storm.

As a matter of practice, the American democracy has usually shown remarkable restraint in times of international storm; has reposed great confidence in the President, and rallied in a non-partisan manner to his support. It has thereby confessed its own sense of incapacity to handle foreign affairs by any process of initiative and referendum. And as demonstrating this it will be recalled how, at the time of the crisis with Germany over the sinking of the *Sussex*, when certain interests opposed to the policy of the President endeavored to curb his freedom by Congressional action, the whole country indignantly warned Congress to leave the control of foreign relations where it properly belongs, in the hands of the President and his advisers.

Other suggestive historical instances might be cited to advantage in this connection. Washington was compelled to face a most trying situation at the time of the French Revolution, when many Americans, Jefferson included, felt strongly convinced that the United States was bound by its Treaty of Alliance with France to come to its aid against Great Britain. Washington, however, with as keen a sense of honor, but with a wider range of vision, a keener appreciation of all the factors involved, and a realization of the

permanent best interests of the United States, wisely determined otherwise. As de Tocqueville justly observes, "nothing but the inflexible character of Washington, and the immense popularity which he enjoyed, could have prevented the Americans from declaring war against England. . . . The majority reprobated his policy, but it was afterwards approved by the whole nation."

Consider the situation confronting Lincoln at the time of the Mason-Slidell incident, when the North was exulting over the capture of the Confederate Commissioners from a British vessel, the *Trent*; and the British public, on the other hand, was aflame with indignation over what they considered a gross outrage. Only the patient, courageous, wise policy of Lincoln enabled the United States to reach a prudent and honorable settlement of the difficulty through diplomatic negotiation. It has been asserted, with considerable show of reason, that if there had existed at that moment the same easy means of cable and wireless communication as at the present time, the same degree of publicity, war between England and the United States in all probability would have been inevitable. An inflamed public opinion in both countries would most likely have rendered a peaceful adjustment impossible.

Take the matter of the daring conspiracies on American soil by German official agents, as plainly proved in the cases of von Papen, Boy-Ed, and von Igel, all attachés of the Germany Embassy in Washington. There is little doubt that if the Administration had disclosed to the American people all the mass of incriminating evidence in its possession, which was partially disclosed through British sources, public feeling would have run so high as to demand at least a complete rupture of diplomatic relations with Germany. Some may well believe that this would have been the only self-respecting course for the United States to take under the circumstances. The Administration evidently thought otherwise.

In all these instances, there is every reason to believe that discussion in the market-place and a direct democratic control of foreign affairs would have resulted in very serious difficulties for the country. It would seem contrary to experience and reason to believe that democracy would be any more able to avoid wars than would "secret diplomacy."

Other instances, of course, might be profitably recalled to show the incapacity of democracy to judge wisely, and act with calm, sure confidence in an international crisis, as for example, the stupid intrusion of the French Chamber of Deputies in the policy of the Government when England invited France to intervene jointly in Egypt. It would not seem necessary, however, to stress further this fundamental truth that democracy is ill fitted to conduct foreign relations by market-place discussions. By way of resumé, this incapacity is due to three reasons: (1) the inability of the general public to be fully informed, to comprehend all the factors involved; (2) the supreme need of secrecy at certain moments in order to forward legitimate ends for the security of the State, and to avert trouble; and (3) what has been well characterized by de Tocqueville as the inability of democracy to "regulate the details of an important undertaking, persevere in a fixed design, and work out its execution in spite of serious obstacles."

Except for those who never have carried great responsibilities, who have only looked on from the "side-lines," who have evolved in their arm-chairs splendid theories for the government of the State and the Universe, reasons of the character suggested would seem sufficient to indicate the folly of the proposition to encourage democracy to take control of its international relations from the hands of its trained statesmen. From the point of view of political theory, the issue is to be drawn between those who believe in direct government—the restoration of a pure form of Athenian democracy—and those who believe in truly representative government, which reposes confidence in and gives loyal support to those chosen to steer the ship of state.

But it will be replied by some that, while the captain of a ship is responsible for navigation, the owners of the ship are entirely within their rights in determining the port of destination: that a whole people must be allowed to determine the policy of a nation, whether, for example, it be for war or peace. There would seem to be some truth in this argument, particularly if a people believe in non-resistance, or are gross materialists, whose national motto is "anything for a quiet life," and imagine that war may be avoided at all hazard. But a contemplation of history, of the mysterious, inexorable forces which seem to determine

the destinies of nations; of the sudden storms that arise, the dangers, the tests of manhood, the appeals to honor and sense of duty—all tends to reveal the utter futility of attempting to formulate with any certainty a national policy able to confront any emergency. One is led to appreciate the profound truth of the epigram uttered by President McKinley, that "Duty determines Destiny." And the ready, courageous recognition of national duty must necessarily lie in the hands of those charged with supreme responsibility, who are best able to judge of the exact situation, of the measures required for the protection of national interests, and the interests of international society in general.

This of course exacts a high degree of trustfulness in its representatives on the part of democracy, especially when one realizes the enormous power centered in the hands of the President as Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy, as well as of the forces of diplomacy—his power to create, by the use or misuse of all these elements, a situation whereby the country may be plunged into war before Congress can exercise its prerogative of *declaring* war. If democracy is ever betrayed by its representatives, it can only withdraw its confidence and visit its scorn on them. This, it must be acknowledged, is a defect of any form of government other than pure democracy, but it would seem, in the light of previous considerations, an infinitely lesser defect than would be involved in requiring absolute publicity in foreign affairs, the consultation of the passengers by the captain of the ship at every emergency, the initiative and referendum, the "collective *unwisdom*" of the market-place.

The question naturally arises whether, if the people are not competent to direct and control diplomacy, there is not therefore a necessity for diplomatic experts specially trained to represent the nation's interests abroad. It is quite common to assume as a matter of course that the United States should have a permanent corps of trained diplomats just as we have a permanent corps of experts in the Army and the Navy. Is this assumption correct? Is there a real analogy between the diplomatic service and the Army and Navy?

In the first place, it should be re-emphasized that the qualities necessary for success in diplomacy are the very qualities necessary for pre-eminence and success in private

and public life; namely, tact, knowledge of men, intelligence, courage, and in general what we are accustomed to call common-sense. These are the possessions of no privileged class, whether of diplomats or business men. They certainly are not the technical requirements which men in the Army and Navy must possess: that expert knowledge of guns and ships, machinery and organization, tactics and strategy. It is therefore most misleading to speak metaphorically of the diplomats as constituting the outer line of defense of a country, and hence requiring to be specially trained into a special corps as a co-ordinate service with the Army and Navy. It is true that diplomats occasionally require the aid of the Army and Navy; and that they often obviate the necessity for either; but it is not true that there is any real parallel between them as concerns expert knowledge and training.

A little reflection concerning certain facts—I am confident from personal experience—will lead one seriously to question the desirability of having a permanent, classified diplomatic service, offering, as the Army and Navy, a life career. One great objection lies in the accumulation of what a colleague in the British Diplomatic Service once characterized as “dead timber.” A sure tenure of service, the attainment of a certain respectable rank, a substantial increase in one’s family with all its increasing needs, a routine, bureaucratic method of transacting business, a perfunctory attitude towards matters of importance—all conduce most powerfully to a consequent lack of ambition, power of initiative, and to a desire for quiet ease; to that condition characterized as “dead timber.” Mere skill in the drafting of notes, in the orderly conduct of chancery work, in social address, can in no way compensate for the loss of that personal initiative, that keen interest and fresh enthusiasm which, as a rule, has distinguished most of the American diplomatic representatives eager to make a creditable record during the uncertain time of their service abroad.

Another great objection to a permanent, classified diplomatic service is the danger to which diplomats are exposed—and for some inexplicable reason, American diplomats in particular—of becoming denationalized to a certain extent, of becoming cosmopolitan to such a devitalizing degree that they cease to be thoroughly representative of their country

in its varied interests, its national characteristics, its feelings, sympathies, and even its ideals. The prime requisite in a diplomat is that he should be absolutely representative, the faithful interpreter of his fellow-countrymen, of their ideas, ideals, and highest interests. Anything which operates to deprive a man of direct, vital touch with the daily life—the swiftly changing life of a country like the United States—and with its intimate concerns, inevitably tends to render him less efficient as a diplomatic representative.

This fact is of special importance when it comes to the question of national policies. It is apparent that the United States has been unable to lay down the broad lines of permanent policies so that they may be automatically developed and carried out by successive administrations. Even the Monroe Doctrine, which is generally regarded as a permanent policy, has been subjected to ever new and extraordinary interpretations that have profoundly altered its original character. Witness the "Receivership Policy" of President Roosevelt, the "Dollar Diplomacy" of President Taft, and the "Constitutionalism" of President Wilson. In all such instances, the President, in the execution of his foreign policies, is fairly entitled to the services of men in direct touch and sympathy with the Administration and its purposes. He is entitled to the greatest freedom in selecting men of affairs, of large vision, and ability properly to represent the nation abroad. He cannot justly be circumscribed in his choice, whether for Peking, Panama, or the Court of St. James, to a list of men long in residence abroad, and out of vital touch with their country, often without the peculiar qualifications required for appointment at a given moment to some post of special importance. He must be free to choose men of the stamp of Lowell, Hay, Herrick, van Dyke, Reinsch and Francis.

If the President be free, as he ought properly to be free, in his right of appointment—subject of course to the consent of the Senate—then all possibility of a permanent, classified diplomatic service is naturally eliminated. You cannot honestly hold out to a young man the prospect of a diplomatic career if you cannot ensure his advancement above the rank of secretary of embassy, and when superannuated, the right of retirement under a pension. For the reasons before indicated, there can be no guarantee of a sure berth or an embassy, except in case of conspicuous

merit and unusual fitness for the particular post to be filled, as in the case of Mr. Fletcher, appointed Ambassador to Mexico.

It may be objected that such a condition of affairs virtually means that only rich men can afford to represent their country abroad. This does not necessarily follow, however, though it is a fact that American diplomats have in many posts been notoriously underpaid. It is obviously incumbent on the Government to provide permanent embassies and legations properly maintained as residences for its representatives in order that they may worthily uphold the dignity of the country; and also compensate them sufficiently to enable them to render their services without personal sacrifice. It should be remarked, however, in passing, that it would undoubtedly be a misfortune if diplomatic posts were so well paid as to be an object for greedy politicians.

In regard to the positions of secretaries of embassies and legations, which also should be well paid: if men of ambition are unwilling to risk their careers in so uncertain a service, then the United States must be content with such men as can be obtained. But, as a matter of fact, there are always to be found plenty of men of ability who, either because of independent means, or the desire for foreign experience and special opportunities, are perfectly willing to take these minor positions. It is true that some of them will be keenly disappointed because of a failure to secure promotion; but it cannot be charged that they have been misled into believing that they had been assured a permanent career, or eligibility for appointment whenever a vacancy should occur at London or Paris.

The position taken here should not be interpreted as favoring the elimination of merit from the diplomatic service, or a plea for the "spoils system." Exceptional merit should of course be rewarded where men have rendered diplomatic services of special value, and when their retention is essential for the best interests of the country. But even in such cases, it rests necessarily with the President and the Secretary of State to determine which diplomats may be worthy of special recognition.

Nothing could be more reprehensible than the Bryan conception of finding well paid jobs for "deserving Democrats." But where the President may desire to single out

men of his own party who are in sympathy with his policies, and conspicuously fitted to represent the United States abroad, there is nothing inherently objectionable in his having the freedom to make such appointments. A number of President Wilson's appointments have plainly been made in deference to the old "spoils system" so naively favored by Mr. Bryan. They cannot be too strongly condemned; but this criticism has also been true of not a few diplomatic appointments by Republican Presidents. The good appointments should be remembered with the bad; and it is especially gratifying to recall in particular the appointment of the Hon. William Phillips, a Republican, as Third Assistant Secretary of State, a man of exceptional training and aptitude for diplomacy, who has been charged with the special task of the efficient organization of the diplomatic service.

The American public does well to insist on able and worthy diplomatic representation abroad. We should be vigilant to demand the highest type of men, and the recognition of conspicuous merit. We should not, however, be unduly critical, or be led into the error of demanding a permanent, classified diplomatic service similar to the Army and Navy. For the reasons already considered, this does not seem either necessary or desirable.

By way of summary, our consideration of the relation of democracy to diplomacy would seem to have led us to the three following conclusions:

I. First of all, it is a fundamental error to confuse diplomacy as a profession with the policies it may be called on to execute: to identify the agent with the principal: to center criticism on the instrument rather than on the man who wields it. The methods of diplomacy will depend primarily on the personalities of the statesmen responsible for the conduct of foreign affairs. The policy which may guide these statesmen and a nation as a whole may be good or bad, wise or imprudent, farsighted or opportunistic, courageous or cowardly in an emergency.

II. The determination of a nation's policy, whether in time of calm or of international storm, must rest largely in the hands of the responsible statesmen chosen by democracy to safeguard the nation's interests. The secrecy required to protect and forward national interests, the comprehensive knowledge of all the factors involved, the breadth of vision,

the keen sense of responsibility to future as well as present generations, the pertinacity of purpose that is needed—all preclude the efficient management of a nation's vast interests by discussion in the market-place. The "democratization of foreign policies" therefore cannot mean that democracy, by a process of initiative and referendum, would commit the folly of refusing confidence and support to its responsible statesmen in times of diplomatic complications and international danger.

III. The large measure of freedom which necessarily must be granted the President in his conduct of foreign relations must also logically include the greatest freedom in his choice of diplomatic agents for the execution of policies and the most effective representation of American interests. This means of course that a classified, permanent, diplomatic service, at least at the present stage of the country's development, is decidedly unwise and undesirable. Conspicuous merit should be recognized, and bad appointments vigorously condemned. The American people have the right and the obligation to insist on a high standard of diplomacy and diplomatic appointments. It still remains fundamentally true, however, that democracy for its own good must not attempt to embarrass the President and his advisers in their conduct of foreign affairs. It should frankly acknowledge, as it usually has been patriotically ready to acknowledge, its own inherent incapacity for diplomacy.

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